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SUBJECT: SNS-NOMINATED UPN CHAIRMAN SAYS THE RIGHT THINGS

REF: 06 BRATISLAVA 586

¶1. (SBU) On February 9, PolOff and PolFSN met with Ivan Petrasky, PhD, the new Chairman of the Institute of the Memory of the Nation (UPN). Petrasky was nominated by the far-right Slovak National Party (SNS) whose members generally profess an admiration for Jozef Tiso, leader of the WWII-era fascist Slovak state, responsible for the deportation of tens of thousands of Slovak Jews, Roma, and others to their deaths in concentration camps. Several previous SNS nominees for the chairmanship did not receive parliamentary approval. UPN is responsible for the preservation and publication of restricted files from Slovakia's government intelligence agencies during its two previous totalitarian regimes (fascist and communist) from 1939-1989.

¶2. (SBU) Just finishing his first week as UPN Chairman, the 30-yr-old Petrasky opened the meeting by expressing appreciation for the cooperation agreement between UPN and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), adding that he looked forward to the continuation of the agreement (reftel). In response to questions, he assured PolOff that UPN would remain committed to fulfilling its entire mandate covering both previous regimes. His deputy jumped in, specifying both "totalitarian" regimes, after which Petrasky echoed the "totalitarian" phrasing.

¶3. (SBU) Not a member of SNS himself, Petrasky is a professional historian who previously worked for Matica Slovenska, a cultural heritage organization that has taken on a nationalistic, anti-minority slant in recent years. SNS likely nominated him as someone sympathetic to their far-right beliefs while being too young to have skeletons in his closet. However, a day before parliament voted on his nomination, it became public that he had attended an event honoring the WWII-era Slovak state alongside members of Slovenska Pospolitost (a neo-nazi group which glorifies the Tiso regime). This did not stop parliament from electing him.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT. Petrasky came across as reserved and somewhat in-over-his-head. Whatever his personal beliefs, at this meeting he made the right statements indicating that UPN will not ignore or manipulate WWII-era files. He even encouraged the idea of increased cooperation with USHMM and the Embassy. For the time being, we will continue to engage with Petrasky to indicate that we expect him to keep to his word.

VALLEE